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ABSTRACT

In fall 1992, a study was conducted at Sinclair Community College (SCC) in Dayton, Ohio, to determine factors contributing to former students' decisions not to return to the college. Two groups of former students were included the study: those who had last attended in fall 1990 and had thus been absent for 6 quarters, and those who had last attended in fall 1991 and had been absent for 3 quarters. Random samples of 360 and 400 students were selected from the two groups, respectively. Of the 760 surveys mailed, 243 former students provided usable responses for a 36% response rate. Study findings included the following: (1) personal/family considerations or financial concerns were cited by more than 50% of respondents, while 17% indicated that they had achieved their educational goals, 12% had moved, and 18% had transferred to another college; (2) 72.9% of the 1990 group stated that they had originally planned to get a degree, compared to 88.1% of the 1991 group; (3) 38% of the 1990 group and 53% of the 1991 group indicated an intent to return to SCC; (4) students from the 1991 group were more likely to cite goal uncertainty, scheduling problems, and financial concerns as reasons for not returning, and less likely to cite time and transportation considerations than the 1990 group; and (5) career uncertainty and scheduling problems were more frequently cited as reasons for not returning among students who indicated they were degree-seeking. Responses to open-ended questions, tables, and a reader evaluation survey are included. (PAA)

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FORMER STUDENT SURVEY
1993

Institutional Planning & Research
Sinclair Community College
Dayton, Ohio 45402

JC 930 388

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SURVEY OF FORMER STUDENTS
REPORT OF FINDINGS

Reader please note: An evaluation form for you to fill out concerning this report can be found on the last page. Your input will be greatly appreciated.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The survey was designed to determine which factors contribute to a student's not returning to Sinclair after having attended at least one quarter. While several factors such as moving out of the area and personal problems are not under the control of the College, others might indicate areas where improvements could be made in an effort to retain more students. Of specific interest were the items which dealt with career uncertainty, financial concerns, problems with scheduling or course planning, and concerns with the content or instruction of courses. The length of time a student had been absent and whether they had been degree-seeking when they first enrolled were also considered to be relevant factors.

SURVEY DESIGN

In the Fall of 1992, 760 participants were randomly selected from two distinct subgroups of students who had not graduated:

1) Those who had last attended classes in the Fall of 1990 and thus had been absent for 6 quarters
2) Those who had last atttended classes in the Fall of 1991 and had been absent 3 quarters.

There was a total of 1,395 students who fell into these categories and the random samples consisted of 360 students from the 1990 pool and 400 students from the 1991 group for a total survey sample of 760.

The survey instrument was a one-page questionnaire placed on the reverse side of a personalized cover letter. It included several items found to be relevant in previous surveys with non-returning students and was kept short in order to encourage reponse. Of the 760 surveys mailed out, 85 were undeliverable, and 243 were completed and returned for a valid response rate of 36%.

OVERALL RESPONSE PATTERNS

Not returning: Contributing Factors:

The questionnaire presented eleven possible reasons for not returning to Sinclair and asked the students to indicate whether each item was a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason for their decision not to return since their last quarter. Overall response percentages are found in Appendix A.

Personal/family considerations and financial concerns were cited by more than 50% of students as a reason for not returning. In addition, time or transportation difficulties, uncertainty about career choice, and problems with scheduling or course planning were also selected frequently. About 17% said they had completed their goals, 12% had moved, and 18% had transferred to another college. An overwhelming majority (over 92%) did not feel out of place in college and only 21% had concerns with the content or instruction of courses.

Degree-seeking & Intent to Return

The majority of respondents (82%) said that they had originally planned to get a degree. Concerning the intent to return to Sinclair, over 46% answered affirmatively. It is interesting to note, however, that nearly 40% of all respondents were uncertain about returning. This level of uncertainty is considerably higher than that found in recent surveys conducted by this Office on similar populations. It may reflect skepticism about the value of higher education in a sluggish economy, perhaps particularly since so many students cited financial difficulties as their reason for not returning.

SUBGROUP ANALYSES:

Reasons to leave considering last quarter attended:

In addition to examining the responses for the overall group, analyses were performed on the two subgroups specified in the "Survey Design" section, that is, students who had been absent for 6 quarters (1990) and students who had been absent for 3 quarters (1991). Appendix B shows the response percentages for each of these subgroups. While the same five factors were selected most often by both groups, those students who had been out only three quarters were more strongly inclined to choose goal uncertainty, scheduling problems, and financial concerns and less likely to cite time and transportation difficulties than those who had been out six quarters.

Degree & Intent to Return considering last quarter:

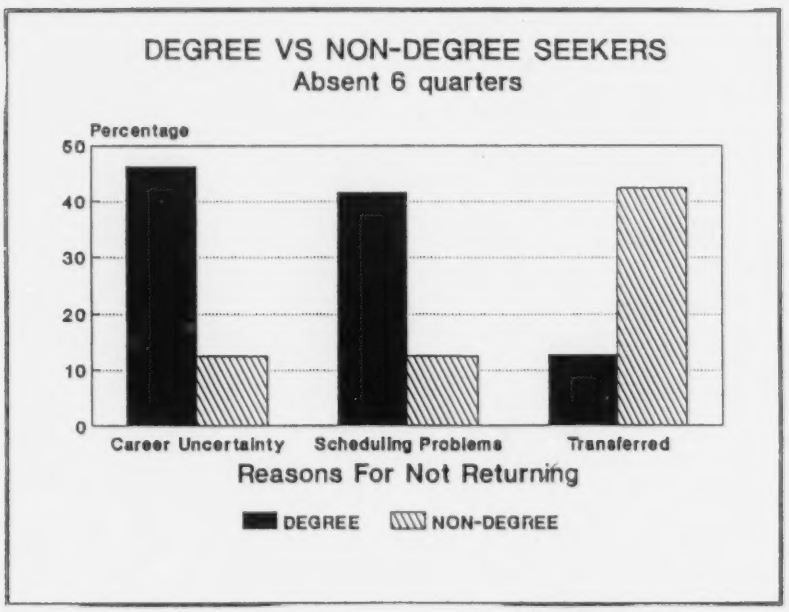
Most of the respondents, regardless of how long they had been out of school, said that they had originally planned to get a degree. The percentage was noticeably higher, though, for those who had only been out three quarters which could suggest an increased tendency towards degree-seeking among incoming students.

Concerning the intention to return to Sinclair, a larger percentage of those absent three quarters said they were planning to return than was true of those gone six quarters. This is understandable as it often becomes more difficult to return to school the longer an individual stays out.

Reasons to leave considering degree-seeking orientation:

In addition to looking at these former students as a whole group and according to how long they had been away from school, their reasons for not returning were also examined by placing them into two groups according to whether they had originally intended to get a degree when entering Sinclair. Seven of the original reasons for not returning were chosen for a Chi Square analysis and a number of statistically significant differences emerged between the degree-seekers and non degree-seekers. (See Appendix C). Since the significant factors were not the same for the three quarter group and the six quarter group, the two sets of responses are presented separately. Figure 1 below shows, for the significantly different factors, the response percentages of students who had been absent 6 quarters, taking into account their degree-seeking orientation.

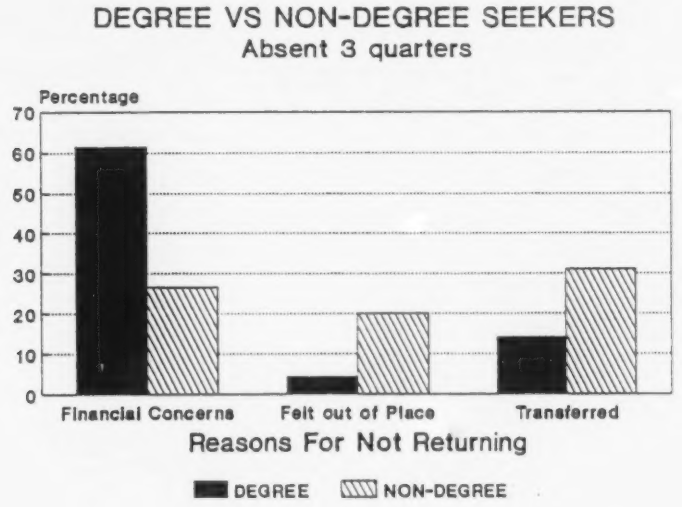
Figure 1



Career uncertainty and scheduling difficulties appear to be a lot more problematical for the degree-seeking students accounting perhaps for a good deal of attrition in that group. As might be expected, it was the non degree-seekers who more often cited transferring as a reason for leaving.

Figure 2 below shows those factors which were significantly different for the degree-seekers and non degree-seekers among those who had been absent only 3 quarters. In this group, financial concerns and feeling out of place in college emerged as diffferentiating factors for degree- and non degree-seekers, and transferring was again a significant factor. The degree-seekers were primarily concerned with financial considerations and were much less likely to feel out of place or to cite transferring as a reason for not returning. Looking at the complete analysis results in Appendix C, it is interesting to note that while career uncertainty among degree-seekers was cited a little less often by the 3-quarter group than those out 6 quarters, the concern with finances was almost twice as great. This escalating concern over the availability of funds to pay for college suggests the need for even greater efforts to provide financial aid information and assistance to as many degree-seekers as possible.

Figure 2



Reasons to leave considering intent to return:

A final way of subdividing the total group was in reference to whether they indicated they were planning to return to Sinclair. Those who answered affirmatively were categorized as returners while those who were unsure or who responded negatively were categorized as non-returners. In general, those students who intended to return were significantly more likely to cite financial concerns and significantly less likely to choose transferring as a reason for not returning. This pattern of responding was true regardless of how long the students had been absent, but was more pronounced in those who had been absent only 3 months. The patterns of responding and results of the analysis can be found in Appendix D.

The pattern of responding by those who said they were uncertain about returning or would not return was more random and tended to be evenly divided as to the reasons for leaving.

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES:

One final item on the survey asked the respondents for suggestions on changes or improvements that Sinclair could have made which would have helped them achieve their academic goals. More than half of the students responded to this question and samples of their comments can be found in Appendix E. A complete listing of all the comments is available upon request. About 44 individuals said that no changes were necessary and indicated that Sinclair had done an excellent job. The specific areas that students saw as needing improvement, and the number of respondents who mentioned these items are as follows:

1). Course scheduling, specifically the times courses were offered (N=23)
2). Content and grading of courses (N=11)
3). Financial aid and tuition (N=12)
4). Advising & counseling (N=16)
5). Quality and/or competence of some instructors (N=8)
6). Deficiencies in specific service areas such as the cafeteria, bookstore and registration (N=7)
7). Miscellaneous categories including: Child care, the need for student housing, location of branch campuses, etc. (N=10)

APPENDIX A

FORMER STUDENT FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Directions: For the following list of 11 items, please indicate with a check mark whether each item was a MAJOR reason, a MINOR reason, or NOT a reason for your decision not to return to Sinclair since your last Quarter. Check only one selection per item, please.

N=243	(3) MAJOR REASON	(2) MINOR REASON	(1) NOT A REASON
1. Completed desired educational goal	13.3%	3.7%	83.0%
2. Moved out of area	9.9%	2.7%	87.4%
3. Uncertain about career choice	13.2%	25.6%	61.2%
4. Financial Concerns	30.3%	24.0%	45.7%
5. Uncertain whether college is needed	5.6%	12.6%	81.9%
6. Personal/family considerations	36.7%	19.0%	44.3%
7. Time or transportation difficulties	25.8%	16.7%	57.5%
8. Problems with scheduling or course planning	16.3%	24.0%	59.7%
9. Concerns with content/instruction of courses	8.3%	12.4%	79.4%
10. Felt out of place in college	1.4%	6.5%	92.1%
11. Transferred to another college	16.4%	1.8%	81.7%

_____
Name of College

When you first came to Sinclair, did you plan to get a degree?
82.0% 1) Yes 18.0% 2) No

Do you intend to return to Sinclair?
29.4% 1) Yes, within a year
17.4% 2) Yes, but not within the year
39.6% 3) Uncertain at this time
13.6% 4) No intention of returning at this time

In your opinion, what changes or improvements could Sinclair have made which would have helped you to achieve your academic goals?

APPENDIX B
RESPONSE FREQUENCIES
BY GROUP

REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING	MAJOR OR MINOR REASON		
	GROUP 1 (1990)	GROUP 2 (1991)	OVERALL GROUP
Completed educational goal	18.2%	16.1%	17.0%
Moved out of area	13.8%	11.6%	12.6%
Uncertain about career choice	36.7%	40.3%	38.8%
Financial concerns	50.0%	57.2%	54.3%
Uncertain whether college is needed	19.3%	17.3%	18.2%
Personal/family considerations	55.6%	55.7%	55.7%
Time/Transportation Difficulty	47.2%	39.4%	42.5%
Problems with scheduling or course planning	33.3%	45.1%	40.3%
Concerns with the content or instruction of courses	18.8%	21.9%	20.7%
Felt out of place in college	10.1%	6.3%	7.9%
Transferred to another college	21.1%	16.3%	18.2%

Original plans to get a degree	GROUP 1 (1990)	GROUP 2 (1991)	OVERALL GROUP
YES	72.9%	88.1%	82.0%
NO	27.1%	11.9%	18.0%

Intent to return to Sinclair	GROUP 1 (1990)	GROUP 2 (1991)	OVERALL GROUP
Yes, within a year	25.8%	31.9%	29.4%
Yes, not within the year	12.4%	21.0%	17.4%
Uncertain at this time	41.2%	38.4%	39.6%
No intention to return now	20.6%	8.7%	13.6%

APPENDIX C

PERCENT WHO CHOSE THE FACTOR
AS A MAJOR OR MINOR REASON

ABSENT 6 QUARTERS

	DEGREE SEEKERS	NON-DEGREE SEEKERS	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	46.2%	12.5%	*
Financial concerns	34.0%	41.7%	NS
Uncertain college is needed	17.5%	20.9%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	41.5%	12.5%	*
Content of courses concerns	23.1%	8.3%	NS
Felt out of place in college	12.5%	4.2%	NS
Transferred to other college	12.7%	42.3%	*

ABSENT 3 QUARTERS

	DEGREE SEEKERS	NON-DEGREE SEEKERS	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	42.5%	26.7%	NS
Financial concerns	61.5%	26.7%	*
Uncertain college is needed	15.3%	33.3%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	44.3%	53.3%	NS
Content of courses concerns	21.4%	20.0%	NS
Felt out of place in college	4.5%	20.0%	*
Transferred to other college	14.3%	31.2%	**

OVERALL

	DEGREE SEEKERS	NON-DEGREE SEEKERS	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	43.8%	18.0%	**
Financial concerns	58.9%	35.9%	*
Uncertain college is needed	16.1%	25.7%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	43.4%	28.2%	NS
Content of courses concerns	22.0%	12.8%	NS
Felt out of place in college	7.4%	10.3%	NS
Transferred to other college	13.7%	38.1%	**

* = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$
NS = Not significantly different

APPENDIX D

PERCENT WHO CHOSE THE FACTOR
AS A MAJOR OR MINOR REASON

ABSENT 6 QUARTERS

	DO INTEND TO RETURN	NO INTENT TO RETURN	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	36.1%	37.0%	NS
Financial concerns	60.0%	43.3%	NS
Uncertain college is needed	17.1%	21.8%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	40.5%	28.3%	NS
Content of courses concerns	22.2%	16.7%	NS
Felt out of place in college	13.9%	7.5%	NS
Transferred to other college	14.3%	25.5%	NS

ABSENT 3 QUARTERS

	DO INTEND TO RETURN	NO INTENT TO RETURN	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	39.1%	40.7%	NS
Financial concerns	66.7%	44.8%	*
Uncertain college is needed	14.3%	20.7%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	43.1%	46.7%	NS
Content of courses concerns	21.9%	22.4%	NS
Felt out of place in college	4.8%	8.6%	NS
Transferred to other college	8.1%	24.6%	*

OVERALL

	DO INTEND TO RETURN	NO INTENT TO RETURN	CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS RESULTS
Career choice uncertain	38.0%	39.0%	NS
Financial concerns	64.4%	44.1%	**
Uncertain college is needed	15.3%	20.7%	NS
Schedule/course plan problems	42.2%	38.0%	NS
Content of courses concerns	22.0%	19.6%	NS
Felt out of place in college	8.1%	8.1%	NS
Transferred to other college	10.3%	25.0%	**

* = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$
NS = Not significantly different

APPENDIX E

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS:

More selection of classes offered at neighborhood centers.

Sinclair needs an evening program for nursing; that is the only reason I switched as I needed to work full-time.

Need classes during afternoon 2 P.M.-6 P.M.

More classes on weekends

Offer broader sprectrum of application software

I would have liked to stay except my career choice was to further my education in Biomedical Electronics which you do not offer.

Courses should be better structured and planned before being offered for the first time.

More financial aid options, scholarships and grants offered.

Need information on financial assistance to disabled students on limited income from retirement.

More student-teacher time together; I needed help with my work.

A pro-active guidance program

Better, more personalized counseling when I was trying to decide on a major

A few evening/Saturday courses seem to have "sub-par" instructors.

Use 'educators' as instructors. Certain of the 'moonlighting' instructors lacked the desire to really 'teach'.

Cheaper prices in the cafeteria

Keep books on hand for courses in bookstore - they come in too late.

Babysitting that didn't cost so much

I was satisfied with all aspects of Sinclair.

I achieved my goal and now have an excellent job in travel.

1993 FORMER STUDENT SURVEY: READER EVALUATION

After you have reviewed the attached report, please take a few additional minutes to respond to the questions below. Your responses will assist the Office of Institutional Research & Planning in determining if our work is meeting your needs and what changes we might make to serve you better. Please return this completed form to IPR, Rm 7330. Thanks for your cooperation and assistance!

1. Using a scale ranging from 1 = very pertinent to 5 = totally irrelevant, please indicate the overall usefulness of this report to you in your position at SCC.
   1.__ 2.__ 3.__ 4.__ 5.

2. Using a scale ranging from 1 = excellent to 5 = poor, please indicate the effectiveness of the narrative portion of the report in communicating information to you.
   1.__ 2.__ 3.__ 4.__ 5.
   Are there any specific suggestions you care to offer with regard to improving the narrative?

3. Using a scale from 1 = excellent to 5 = poor, please indicate the effectiveness of the graphs and/or tables in the report in communicating information to you.
   1.__ 2.__ 3.__ 4.__ 5.
   Are there any specific suggestions you care to offer with regard to the graphs and/or tables?

4. Is there any information missing from this report which you would find valuable? Additional needs?

5. Please indicate if your position is in:
   __ Instruction
   __ Student Services
   __ Administrative/Support Services